

Congressman Jesse L. Jackson, Jr. released the following statement today as part of the Progressive Caucus State of the Union message:

"140 years ago, President Abraham Lincoln looked over the state of our union and saw a nation embroiled in a great Civil War. Eleven states had left the union, and he said our nation cannot exist half slave and half free. Our nation was not living up to its constitutional charge—maintaining and building a more perfect Union.

"Today the union amongst our states remains imperfect. In the 50 states, there remain separate and unequal education systems, separate and unequal health systems, separate and unequal housing systems.

"Tonight, President George Bush will NOT offer A More Perfect Union in his State of the Union message.

"We all agree that America remains a great nation. The problem is that the gaps between our nation's haves and have-nots also remain great, and, in fact, have widened. The number of Americans without jobs is greater than it was a year ago. The number of Americans without health care is greater than it was year ago. The number of states running deficits is greater than it was a year ago, and those deficits are greater than they were a year ago. One number that is NOT greater, is the number of American children who will receive benefits under the No Child Left Behind Act, since the President's budget leaves it woefully underfunded.

"My Progressive friends, I stand with you today with a challenge: let us lead the nation toward a more perfect state of the union. Let us not stay in the verbal fray of right and left ... progressive, liberal, moderate, conservative ... Democrat and Republican ...or at this critical hour, war and peace. Let us call on the President, both parties and the nation to move from promises and underfunded programs to RIGHTS.

"We all share a goal of high quality education and health care for every American. Why are those goals, and not RIGHTS? Why are we discussing who benefits from what vital program, who doesn't, and why? The best of what America has to offer must be available to every

American. Isn't that the real American dream?

"My friends, I ask you to join me in an effort to recognize education and health care as the fundamental rights they are by codifying them in our Constitution. I propose an Education Amendment and a Health Care Amendment to our Constitution. And let's add the AFFIRMATIVE right to vote to the Constitution, to ensure that every American understands—whether they're poor or on the Supreme Court—that we all count, and we are all needed in our ongoing mandate to form a more perfect union.

"In 2000, 50-million Americans voted for George W. Bush. 50-million, 500-thousand voted for Al Gore. 100- million Americans didn't vote at all! They didn't think either candidate and their party offered a solution to their problems. The solution I propose would build A More Perfect Union, A More Perfect State of the Union, and enlist every American with a fundamental right in the great struggle to 'get us there.'"